Twilight: An Illustration Of A Potentially Negative Social Influence

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Abstract: Using the classic example of the series Twilight, we can see how society plays a critical role in our thought process, and examine the dangers it can create by leaving some vulnerable to negative lifestyles. Taking a closer look at the science behind how our brain processes information, we can see how problems may arise. Addictions caused by social programming leaves much concern for those who experience the cognitive dissonance created by their surroundings. It is our social responsibility to ensure people are not establishing unhealthy lifestyles or destructive behaviors. By understanding the mechanics of the mind, we can help find healthy solutions for fantasy to be enjoyed without interrupting the livelihood of others.


1 INTRODUCTION
In the perfect world, fictional writing for entertainment purposes would be harmless. Unfortunately, this is not the case for some and is negatively affecting their lives. The popular film Twilight is a classic example of how social influence can impact and potentially harm those who are unaware of its negative implications. The “rush” created by romantic fantasy is addicting and intoxicating, leaving confusion in distinguishing between realities (Margolies). Twilight features an abusive male companion that strays Bella, the lead female character, away from being a strong independent woman. She loses accountability for herself as she entrusts it to her dangerous, abusive, and “loving” male partner (Borgia 157). The ability for fantasies to provide readers a reliable source of comfort and stimulation can lead to compulsive and repetitive behaviors, developing into symptoms (Margolies). It is plausible that there can be unrealistic expectations created by engaging in the fantasy world. Subconsciously, if our inner dialogue is managed by other’s cultural habits, how we feel can start to contradict what we do. Risky behaviors such as affairs develop as one gets “lost” in the confusion where the two worlds combine (Margolies). Many relationships have suffered because of the unrealistic expectations fictional romance media such as Twilight have created. Wives are no longer being fulfilled in their marriages because of the high standards dream boy, “Edward”, has created. Reading over blogs on the internet clearly shows this is the case for many. Being a member of one of these online groups puts one even more at risk. As the more people acknowledge a toxic substance to be good, the more it will actually be believed to be so. This poses a large threat, especially to those easily influenced by others. Even in a society that encourages unhealthy habits, those who want to be a part of the ‘In’ crowd create cognitive dissonance when their personal opinions do not match those of popular persuasion.

This type of dissonance causes the conformist group to do what everyone else is doing (Guazzini, Eiko, and Giorgio). Sadly, independent thought appears to diminish the more media influences our thoughts and the way we process life around us. Often times, it is not important that we are being true to ourselves as much as our desire for a sense of belonging.

2 DIAGRAM
The blind test done by Guazzini, Eiko, and Giorgio shows that under the ‘blind’ condition, the subjects looking at computer images where not influenced by social forces. As they were able to obtain less conformity, they are free from groupthink. They were also comfortable enough to spend more time looking at the images, enabling them to gather more information to make an independent decision for themselves. It is suggested that popular vote is what makes the world go round, and it is important to our mental and physical health to find a way out of this habit. In a way, it is almost protecting the subjects from appearing ‘different’, leading less change to be exiled from the community for being a complication without that social group. After all, if everyone is on the same page, there is smooth sailing ahead. It is when one deviates from the norm that they are seen as a threat within a society

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3 SOCIAL PRESSURES

Young girls often create cliques. If these cliques are dangerous it can lead the other young females to harm only by association in that they may only like the idea based on popularity so they can fit in. Imagine if you had a daughter that didn’t like Twilight until all of her friends did. You would know she didn’t really care for Twilight, but she wouldn’t understand this concept because she is the one experiencing the social pressures and cognitive dissonance. These young minds are not fully developed enough to have much critical thought, yet alone awareness of their surroundings or themselves. In this situation, the adult must take responsibility for the unhealthy habits potentially created. Twilight often confuses these girls’ perception of reality and leaves them unable to fill voids as they are unable to find their perfect version of Edward. As Guazzini states, “Social pressure and individual cognitive dynamics are complex variables in decision making that can give very useful insight in predicting human behavior” (Guazzini 12). Who is really in control here? It is important that we don’t let our surroundings influence our decisions. This can be a battle given the current conditions of our social environment. Literally everywhere we go there is some form of marketing that’s goal is to alter our thoughts to get us to buy their product. For example, movie theaters have been showing previews before movies for as long as we can remember, and studies have shown that those who watched an ad on coke most likely bought the product. Whether we like it or not, we are constantly under the influence of our surroundings and subconsciously make decisions based on what we are told. Media such as film, the internet, and television play a huge role in our thoughts and the way we perceive ourselves. Meme’s are images we see that basically tell stories. These images transmit information through thought patterns and ideas. These ideas can become powerful as consciousness is created through them. Alsobrook makes the assertion that all media serves as substrates for consciousness and that it offers access to new ways of seeing or experiencing the world (Alsobrook 142). This can be thought of as a hidden door into our mind. It is not something we can see or really feel as it is happening, but there are connections being made with or without our approval. It is important to stay grounded as our mind may enable our ability to take accountability for these new pieces of information. This type of control is both dangerous and helpful. It is up to the ones in control to use said information for a good cause, taking into consideration both popular demand and the want/need of acceptance in a social society.

4 TWILIGHT

Twilight’s popularity is socially acceptable, regardless of terrible premises. As Borgia states, “The Twilight series of the millennium despite its careful censoring of explicit sexuality, portrays its teenage female protagonist as actively seeking to become the vampire’s victim based on her sexual desire” (Borgia 154). Also adding, “She continually denies the peril that his proximity causes her: ‘I refuse to be convinced to fear him, no matter how real the danger might be. It doesn’t matter, I repeated in my head’” (Borgia 162). The young Bella in Twilight is clearly in the infatuation state of romance, hindering her ability to think clearly. She is making her decisions based on pure emotions, rather than logic with a concern for her well-being. Becoming a vampire would tear her away from a normal life and essentially take her soul away to be condemned to hell (Twilight). With countless blogs, tweets, websites, and merchandise, Twilight has stayed around much longer than anticipated. There are over 300 websites dedicated to this series, where fans have spent their time and energy crazing over their obsession. There’s nothing wrong with enjoying recreational activities, but each situation and it’s subject should be looked at carefully to make sure is it under control. According to Dr. Borgia, “The Twilight novels’ ability to glorify self-sacrifice as passionate desire obscures their encouragement of women’s subordination, abusive relationships, and its glorification of white privilege makes its wide appeal disturbing and problematic to those to advocate social justice” (Borgia 171). For someone with such vast knowledge on the subject to detect such notions, warrants further investigation on the matter.

5 EMOTIONAL DAMAGE

The severe magnitude of these fantastical thoughts may often be overlooked by the majority of society. Dr. Margolies warns, “Recent MRI research shows that during the infatuation state of romance, or fantasy, the brain shows the same changes as does the brain on cocaine. It leads to continuous pleasure-seeking and immediate gratification” (Margolies). This correlation shows how vulnerable our emotions are to our susceptible imagination, as well as the repercussive similarities between fantastical romance and cocaine. There is a quote from one of my favorite songs by artist Jewel. One of her songs states, “Drugs are all we know of love.” I find this to be true on a biological level. It is the brain’s stimulation to that area of the brain that sparks our emotions and interest to begin with. It is clear that our emotions can have the same negative consequences as someone on a drug such as cocaine or crack. Since cocaine is associated with unhealthy lifestyles that go towards dangerous paths, what does that say about our future when a cultural phenomenon is connected to such an addicting drug that ruins lives daily? This addiction can be seen in many women’s lives especially one’s that can be viewed via blogs and interviews. In one interview, Chrystal Johnson admits, “I ended up moving out of the house and fought for my marriage for six weeks. I had to take a step back and detox myself from Twilight. I was really angry that I had allowed it to suck me in.” There are many similar cases found throughout the internet. For a fictional novel/movie to come
between a real-life commitment speaks volumes of the dangers our imagination can lead us to. Alexander writes, “Addiction is a harmful lifestyle, which may or may not involve drugs, which more and more people in free market society are adopting as a desperate measure to prevent themselves from being crushed by severe, prolonged dislocation (Alexander)”. The part of this quote that speaks to me is when he says that it doesn’t have to be a drug. This can be anything in our lives that is causing us to act like there is a drug involved. It is important to make sure we can control our emotions and not let our emotions control us. This is how many people become addicted to drugs, causing them to behave irresponsibly and making their lives unstable and hard to manage. This should direct one to re-evaluate their daily activities involving social habits, such as going to the store. Are they using their logic or emotion when making purchasing decisions? Is it possible that they are not making the best decision? Perhaps their thoughts and actions are based on cultural or popular norm. For example, if a woman addicted to Twilight had to choose between paying a bill and buying Twilight merchandise, in severe situations she would neglect her responsibilities to fill the void created by this obsession. To add to this dilemma, imagine if she had a group of friend who shared this interest. They would all be condoning an unhealthy lifestyle leading each other’s lives further down a path of destruction. It is easy to see how someone could control the masses as there are similarities to how they would act with a drug-like assistance and emotions. It could be that feeling good about one’s decision making is often more important than making the ‘best’ choice. Media such as television programs and video games also create possibilities of misdirection. An interesting excerpt suggests that recent studies show some areas of the brain perform more than one task and the switching times between them are incompatible with learning. This type of neural circuitry allows parts of the brain to be used and reused in different tasks categories and cognitive domain (Donnarumma 71). Like a vehicle going on autopilot without a conscious driver available, this is a dangerous concept when it comes to our lives and the important decisions to be made within them.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is in our best interest to not let society encourage this type of mindset by praising the novels and films. It can be hard to stay away from the global market as it meets our cultural demands. Alexander states, “All children are intensely motivated to maintain close social bonds with their parents and other caretakers. Unless this drive is badly thwarted, older children and adults later strive to establish and maintain other close relationships, for example, with friends, school-mates, co-workers, and recreational, ethnic, religious, or nationalistic groups” (Alexander). Feeling close to the group one is in is a crucial part of the essence of their being. In many cases, they’re being raised in a world where they may have been abused, neglected, and isolated. The more people become involved in making smart decisions, the more it can then too become a popular norm. The key is to remember who to let control your choices and what companies would benefit humanity as a whole. I wouldn’t make a large bet that politics or media would have our interests at heart. Large corporations that have much to lose from making morally right decisions need to be avoided as well, suggesting that monetary value is more desirable than the corporation’s morals. To feel loved and secure within our society is the most important aspect to conclude on. This powerful quote from Alexander reminds us of this: “Insufficient psychosocial integration can be called ‘dislocation.’ Severe, prolonged dislocation is hard to endure. When forced upon people, dislocation—i.e., ostracism, excommunication, exile, or solitary confinement—is so onerous that it has been used as a dire punishment from ancient times until the present. Severe, prolonged dislocation regularly leads to suicide” (Alexander). Suicide is in an extreme case, but is only showing the severity of dislocation. When we cannot find peace within our lives, we try any and all sources of pleasure and entertainment to compensate for this loss. An important rule of thumb is that no source of entertainment should be used as a means to escape reality. Escaping reality is a temporary solution to a permanent problem. It is this type of mindset that causes so many people to lose sight of themselves.

7 CONCLUSION

There is nothing inherently wrong Twilight or similar fictional arts, but it can be a gateway to an unhealthy mindset and a new standard of reality can be created. This possibility is why it is important to make sure there is a healthy dose of reality to go along with our entertainment venues. Before jumping to conclusions, it is important to make sure that there is an actual problem before trying to reprehend it. In many cases, it is a harmless pleasure for someone to read a fictional novel, or play video games. When you see them becoming less engaged in reality, and not enjoying their normal routine, perhaps they should speak with a professional therapist to talk through their thoughts. We thrive in our communities, so we need to stick together as one cannot escape their place in society. If you see someone behaving in a way that shows to be similar to conformity that is leading to unhealthy thinking that is seemingly negative, try to observe them carefully. You can use this knowledge to help guide them through the program their mind has created and direct them towards the next ‘program’. Despite your good intentions, it is common for people to become offended by your concerns and often will place them in denial of these errors. It is a situation that should be handled with delicacy and care. Don’t be too quick to judge, but do not ignore the warning signs. There are many tricks that your mind can play on you, and no one should feel ashamed or embarrassed by being simply human. Love and compassion is the key to a rewarding and healthy life.

REFERENCES


